

Theosophy, A Perennial Wisdom for a New Age

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Nowadays it is a commonplace that we have arrived at a crucial point in the history of mankind. Most people seem to agree with that statement, even those who do not feel concerned with the semantic value of the word 'crucial'. For the lovers of precision, let us explain that a crucial point is the point at the centre of a cross where two lines cut one another at angles, whatever the value of the angles (there are different shapes of crosses). Similarly, a crucial point in history is a moment when two or more influences meet and intersect one another, allowing then a given civilization to change its course abruptly under an influence which primarily was not its guiding influence. At that rate you might object that every moment in history is crucial, as is crucial every minute in our lives. And you would be quite right. So let us say rather that some moments in history are obviously more crucial than others because they are at the meeting point of very powerful and unequal influences, and then civilization will inevitably follow the guiding line of the more powerful influence.

To-day our present civilization is doomed to die if it does not change its direction. Who can doubt that now? In order to explain how a civilization dies, let me remind you of an old Irish saga.

Long long ago there lived in Ireland a hero who was the great defender of the kingdom of Ulster. Cuchulainn was his name, a name meaning 'the hound of Culann'. He was also referred to as 'the hound of Ulster'. He had received a warrior's initiation which rendered him invincible. At that time Maeve, Queen of Connaught, was doing her utmost to extend her territory at the expense of the neighbouring kingdom of Ulster. But she always had to face Cuchulainn who was able to put to flight any army. "I must get rid of that man", Queen Maeve said to herself. So she sent her spies to Ulster in order to inquire about Cuchulainn's geasa. 'Geasa' is the plural of the Irish word 'geis' which, in mythological texts, meant a taboo.¹ According to tradition, trespassing against a taboo endangered your life, trespassing against two of them would be certain death. When the spies came back from Ulster they gave an account of their mission to Maeve, saying:

"O Queen, Cuchulainn may not eat dog-flesh (he was the 'hound' of Ulster, and a decent creature does not eat of his own kind). He is not allowed to make any difference between Ulster people, whatever caste they may belong to (he was the defender of all the people of Ulster). He is not allowed to part with his weapons (he was a warrior above all else, and what is a warrior without his weapons?). Neither is he allowed to let Ulster be ridiculed (he was the honour of Ulster).

"Now I know enough", said Maeve, "to kill that man."

And one day when Cuchulainn was wandering in the mountains of Mourne, Maeve sent him two magical visions. First of all he met on his way two hags, two ugly old women clad in rags who were cooking a dog for their meal. They hailed him:

“You gallant warrior there, come and share our meal!”

“I am sorry,” Cuchulainn said, “I must not eat dog-flesh”.

“That is a nice answer indeed, Cuchulainn,” they said. “You dine with kings and princes and refuse the invitation of poor wretched women!”

And Cuchulainn had to trespass against one taboo in order to respect another. He chose to eat dog-flesh and, says the legend, his strength withered away. Further on his way he met a bard who said to him:

“Cuchulainn, give me your weapons!”

“I cannot,” Cuchulainn said, “I never part from them.”

“Then,” the bard said, “I shall write a satire to ridicule Ulster!”

“It will not be said,” Cuchulainn replied, “that Ulster was ridiculed by fault of mine.”

Once more he had to trespass against one taboo in order to respect another. He gave his weapons to the bard. Two days later he was killed in action in the first battle he did not win.

This myth of the death of Cuchulainn illustrates a universal truth. When, under the pressure of events, internal contradictions appear in a system of values, the system will inevitably collapse. The story of Cuchulainn's death applies perfectly to the present state of our civilization. It would be useless and tedious to recall here all the internal contradictions of our present civilization (supposing they could be numbered), all the limits we would be compelled to overstep one day or another in order to respect other limits. Let us briefly mention a few of them, and remember that the time to make decisions is no longer in the distant future.

The growing chemical and radio-active pollution created by modern industry has reached an alarming level. Shall we die of pollution? Or should we put a stop to the rapid strides of industry in order to contain pollution at a still tolerable level? But if we restrain industrialization, people in our now urbanized world will starve, and the final result might be a generalized upheaval, the effects of which we can hardly imagine. It might bring us the most terrific wars our planet has ever seen. Shall we die of pollution, of starvation, or of madness?

Again, in order to please our consumer society, should we encourage the growth of robotics? The use of robotics considerably multiplies the production capacity of industry and so lowers the cost of goods. At the same time it alleviates tedious and tiresome work. All that seems to be very good. But the use of robotics also creates a problem it cannot solve by itself. It creates unemployment and a loss of income

in the working classes. Who will buy the consumer goods then? Some still seem to think that a totally robotized industry would permit us to lead a marvellous life of leisure. We may seriously question this. Moreover it is difficult to organize free time.

Freedom has always been one of the cherished ideals of mankind, and this ideal is undoubtedly a factor of spiritual progress. Unfortunately freedom is a mere ideal no longer. It is already part and parcel of the lives of men and women whose ethical development in the great majority, is inadequate to permit of their using freedom without their behaviour becoming a danger to themselves and to others. In consequence, we have the so-called 'permissive society' with all its ill-effects: ferocious egotism, disregard of others, neglect of honour and of moral values, terrorism, the appearance of new mental, emotional and physical diseases before which we feel helpless. As the French students proclaimed when they revolted in May 1968, 'It is forbidden to forbid!' Is it also forbidden to forbid lunacy to penetrate our society? What can we do? Suppress freedom of behaviour by drastic laws? But that would be equivalent to fighting terrorism by terrorism. It would lead us nowhere. Moreover, the suppression of the possibility of free behaviour would be a terrible blow to the progress of mankind. Like our friend Cuchulainn, we are caught in contradictions.

I know very well that such an account of some of the internal contradictions in our society is a caricature. No scientist, no economist, no philosopher would accept it unreservedly. A more accurate analysis of the situation, the prospect of new scientific discoveries, of new technological achievements, of new advances in psychology, could change the pattern of events. Such is, anyhow, a common opinion. But if we think so, are we not to be caught in the trap of some utopic scientism?

During the second half of the nineteenth century, under the influence of the French philosopher Auguste Comte, it was thought everywhere in the West that the so-called 'primitive thinking', that is to say mythical and metaphysical thinking, was now obsolete and that mankind had reached at last its scientific 'age of reason'. Science, it was believed, would solve all problems in the future and would lead us towards a happy society. At that time, unfortunately, one could not imagine that science would develop so rapidly. Neither could one foresee all the possible side-effects of its achievements. Could it be foreseen, for instance, when Sir Alexander Fleming discovered penicillin, that the generalized use of antibiotics would open the door to a proliferation of viruses and fungi? And science is evolving more and more rapidly. Now we begin to realize that scientific knowledge creates more problems than it can solve and that it compels us to perpetually rush headlong into new difficulties. The messianic image of science is gradually fading away.

Our scientific knowledge is necessarily limited. It is limited because our perception of the world which determines what we might call our field of normality is limited. It is also limited on account of the very structure of our rational mind which obliges us to follow the strict rules of a binary logic,² a dissociative logic which dichotomizes the world into Me and not-Me, Here and There, Before and After, the logic of Yes and No. And no relativist theory can fundamentally change this logic

which confines us in a mediate, an indirect and analytical knowledge of the world.

The so-called rational knowledge on which science is founded proceeds by comparing the thing-to-be-known with an infinite series of references already taken for granted. And these references are not fully satisfactory since they are themselves founded on a dichotomy of the world, a dichotomy which separates the observer from the observed. How can we hope, at that rate, ever to reach the whole truth?

Theosophy teaches us that there is no such thing as inanimate matter in the universe. A stone is not inanimate. We cannot see life pulsating in it because the scale of mineral time is too different from our own biological time. But life pulsates in a stone all the same. Theosophy teaches us further that there is no life without consciousness. This means that a stone has consciousness, a consciousness of its own, very different from human consciousness, of course. By analysis we are able to find the density of this or that particular type of stone, its crystalline or amorphous structure, possibly its present degree of radio-activity, and that is about all. Such data are interesting for practical use, but they do not permit us to understand the consciousness of the stone, to discover if such and such a stone agrees with us or not! Analysis will never enable us to know what a stone really is in its entirety.³ In order to know that, we should have to turn ourselves into stones, that is to say, to abolish the distinction between the observer and the observed.

Such a proposition does not appeal much to scientists who may think that Theosophists are not serious when they make such statements. But we *are* serious. We simply have a notion of the world which is not theirs. We have a different field of normality, a field which intersects their field of normality. (We are all living in the same world after all!) But these two fields are not co-extensive with one another and do not conform to the same mathematics. That is why some very simple words like 'knowledge' or 'truth' have a different signification according to whether they are pronounced by a scientist or by a Theosophist. We are not detractors of science. We simply think that science deserves a more sensible epistemology than the one on which it has been based for so long.

When, by analysis, we try to push outwards the boundaries of the unknown, we do nothing more than contrive a multilinear projection of our little selves into outer space, so to speak. What can we discover, then, except an image of our own contradictions and inability to comprehend the whole truth, but rendered a hundred times more complex by the multilinearity of the said projection?

When we ask ourselves why such and such a flower is red, a beginning of a rational answer will be to say: It is red because the molecular structure of its petals absorbs all the radiations of the solar spectrum except the red ones which it reflects. This is a rather complicated way of saying that the flower is red because it is not non-red (non-red including all other colours). As you can see, we have introduced into our explanation the concept of molecular structure, the notion of an interrelation between a molecular structure and sunlight, and the concept of a solar spectrum. And our explanation would have been still more complex had we taken into consideration the

action of light on our retina — an important consideration, because people suffering from some kind of dyschromatopsia (daltonism) would be at a loss to understand what the word 'red' signifies. Here we have an example of what we may call a 'multilinear' projection of our inability to understand the whole truth.

Nowadays the complexity of the knowledge arrived at by analysis is so vast that we do not feel sure that we can master it any longer. Hence, no doubt, all that fantastic literature in which we read stories of the world being blown up by accident because some strange 'ghosts' infiltrate the programmes of computers. All these fancies express our feeling of uneasiness in face of modern science.

I would like to give you now two amusing and mild examples of the complexity and insignificance of some modern scientific data:

In order to establish their calendar, the ancient Mayas of Mexico had to calculate the average duration of the solar year.⁴ These people, who had neither telescopes nor computers at their disposal, had found the number of 365.242129 days per year. To-day our astronomers have found the number of 365.242198 days, that is to say the same number as the Mayas except for the last two decimals! But we should not lose hope. In the future we shall certainly carry the decimals farther. What progress! and at what cost!

As you know, the metrical system was first adopted in France nearly two hundred years ago after the Revolution by a government decree of 7-04-1795.

The metre is the unit of length in this revolutionary decimal system. As a unit of measure is always arbitrary, it was decided that the length of the metre would be equal to a quarter of the ten-millionth part of the earth's meridian. When I was a child we were taught this two-hundred-year-old definition in French primary schools. The definition was not very satisfactory. Since the earth is not a perfect sphere,⁵ how determine the length of an average meridian? Later on it was thought that it would be a good thing, for practical reasons, to have a standard reference metre that would be more manageable than the earth's meridian. And when I was teenager in secondary school we were taught that the metre is the distance between two parallel lines traced one at each end of a bar of iridium-platinum kept in a vacuum at zero degree Celsius in the Breteuil House of the Museum of Arts and Manufactures situated at Sèvres near Paris. Such was the full definition we had to learn.⁶ It had all the appearance of a joke! Fortunately, since 1961 we have at last a scientific definition of the metre. The metre is now 1,650,763.73 times the wavelength, in a vacuum, of a radiation corresponding to the transition between the levels 2 P 10 and 5 D 5 in the atom of krypton 86. And we know that, by definition, this definition can only be provisional. In spite of all that, if you require to convert yards into metres, do so all means without the slightest hesitation!

We could wonder sometimes what our scientists are playing at. But they are not playing! They are simply trying to adapt their vision of the world to a reality which is all the time eluding them.

Our rational knowledge could be compared with the inner space of a balloon. What

is inside will represent the unknown. On account of the binary functioning of our rational mind, we cannot but conceive of the unknown as a sort of opposite to the known. If the known is finite, the unknown must be boundless, although we arbitrarily concede - which is curious, to say the least - that its infinitude is restricted by the very limits of the known (another contradiction in terms). The surface of the balloon will symbolize the contact between the known and the unknown, that is to say our awareness of the existence of the unknown. Now, the more we inflate the balloon, the more its surface grows. In other words, the more the volume of our knowledge grows, the more we realize that the unknown is growing more and more vast. It is hopeless! Scientific advances will always bring their attendant delusions.

But we should not for all that adopt an attitude of retrenchment. We should not decide to stop thinking and retire to some lonely island where we could spend our time sipping fruit-juice and playing the guitar on the warm sand of a sunny beach, while the rest of the world is heading for its doom. That would be equivalent to renouncing our nature as thinking creatures. Man is first of all a thinking creature and this is why, by the way, our mental growth, however illusory it may be, has always been more rapid than our moral development. To be convinced of this, we have but to read the 'negative confession' in the Egyptian Book of the Dead. Morals have not progressed one iota since the days of ancient Egypt.⁷

Once more, what can we do? Should we imagine new conceptual models? But that could only be at most a re-arrangement of our old mental furniture. It could help for a time, but it would be in any case a provisional solution, for new contradictions and unsolvable problems would appear sooner or later. You probably remember those strange words in the Old Testament:

'Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image or any likeness of any thing that is in Heaven above, or that is in the Earth beneath, or that is in the Waters under the Earth.

Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them.'

(Deuteronomy V, 8-9).

It is quite possible that the ancient Hebrews took these words literally. But the Divine Word being absolute and hence omnidimensional, it is perfectly legitimate to transpose it into terms of our present situation and say:

'Do not create any philosophical model (Heaven above), nor any scientific model (the Earth beneath), nor any magico-psychoanalytical model (the Waters under the Earth) if by so doing you become their slave and prisoner.'

Of course it is necessary to create conceptual models if we want to give a structure to civilization. The trouble is that we generally become the prisoners of our models to the point of being blind to their internal contradictions until the whole system

blows up in our face. What would you think of a pathologist who, trying at all costs to explain everything in terms of his own system of reference, would consider that a healthy person is nothing but a patient whose disease has not yet been diagnosed?

But I do not take pleasure in catastrophism, and my purpose is not to discourage you. I simply wish to say that it is high time for us to seek the way to free ourselves from any conceptual model whenever it appears necessary to do so. Theosophy offers us that possibility.

We should now ask ourselves a question of prime importance: Can Theosophy be anything else than yet one more conceptual model? Obviously it is a model, and even a universal model since it applies to domains as different from one another as fundamental science, philosophy, ethics, religion, etc. But we should immediately make two points clear. First, Theosophy is not new: it is as old as the world itself. Secondly, Theosophy cannot be called a conceptual model. It is not based on concepts but on notions, which is quite different. Let us not mistake notions for concepts, and vice-versa. I am afraid we shall have to give up some of the definitions in our current dictionaries, for they usually show a total confusion concerning the words 'concept' and 'notion'.

A concept is a formulation of a knowledge, a formulation created, *conceived* by our rational mind, our kama-manas. It can take shape only within the limits of our binary logic, our separative logic which proceeds, remember, by comparing the thing-to-be-known with an infinite series of references taken for granted. Moreover, a concept also depends on a given culture and language.⁸ For example, shamanistic concepts are totally alien to the majority of us. And translators will agree that certain concepts expressed in one language cannot always be satisfactorily translated into another. The Scottish philosopher Sir William Hamilton wrote that 'concepts are merely the results, rendered permanent by language, of a previous process of comparison'. This is a definition to which we can subscribe.

On the other hand, a notion is something you know by direct experience and which is not limited by rationality, language or culture. A notion has not to be proved. Daylight has not to be proved. When you say that you are Mr. or Mrs. So-and-so, you are expressing a notion, not a concept. How could you prove to your entire satisfaction that you are not a victim of some sort of hallucination? You may look at your passport in order to be reassured as to your identity. But how could you prove to yourself and to others that it is not a false passport delivered by false civil servants who committed a forgery, whether deliberately or not? You could spend a whole Manvantara trying to prove that you are really who you are! But it is sufficient for you to know, by direct experience, who you are, is it not? Anyhow, *conceivable* or not, I *know* that you are kind friends willing to listen to a lecture, the difficulty of which I can *conceive* very well! As a matter of fact, notions are simply perceptions. There are kama-manasic notions (the red colour of a flower, for example). There are also spiritual notions which are perceptions of a higher Reality. Theosophy is founded on spiritual notions.⁹

Madame Blavatsky distinguishes two aspects in Man: the personality or lower Ego, and individuality or higher Ego.¹⁰ The consciousness of the lower Ego is kama-manasic and develops in the field of the analytical, dissociative, indirect knowledge, the domain of concepts. The consciousness of the higher Ego is “noetic”, as H.P.B. puts it. And she adds that the individuality (the higher Ego), being a part of MAHAT, the Universal Mind, is omniscient on its own plane. Here of course we are entering the domain of spiritual notions, that is to say, a sort of knowledge intimately linked with a direct vision of a Higher Reality. At this level, Man is more a seer than a mere thinker, although thought is not abolished, as we shall see later on. And H.P.B. gives us another piece of information: the higher mind or Buddhi-Manas and the lower mind or Kama-Manas are of the same nature, the latter being a projection of MAHAT imprisoned by incarnation in the illusion of separateness.

We must confess that such a teaching is somewhat difficult to understand. Our modern European languages which have essentially developed in the context of a rational culture are more adapted to the formulation of concepts than to the communication of spiritual notions. So, in order to facilitate the comprehension of this most important theosophical teaching, let us remember that “personality” comes from the Latin word “persona”,¹¹ which was the name given by the ancient Romans to the mask that the actors wore on the stage. Our personality is only a mask that hides and at the same time expresses the real being we are. As for “individuality”, it comes from the mediaeval Latin adjective “individuus” meaning “undivided”. Undividedness is a characteristic of the Absolute. If one could divide the Absolute, it would not be the Absolute any longer. And a corollary to that notion is that in the Absolute all values are equal: for example Omniscience is Universal Love, and Universal Love is Omnipotence. In the Absolute, separateness, contradictions, conflicts, can exist no more. When we Theosophists speak of personality and of individuality, we should always remember the etymology of these words.

We immediately realize how difficult it is to communicate such spiritual notions to our contemporaries who will not fail to find them paradoxical. And paradoxical they are indeed for the rational mind. But paradoxical means in no way incoherent. Theosophy is perfectly coherent. Moreover, we should bear in mind (in our lower mind) that the theosophical teaching does not derive from an autistic vision of H.P.B., from a vision of the world belonging to herself only. This teaching was cross-checked all down the ages by generations and generations of Great Seers.

My intention is not to give a course on Theosophy. Nevertheless I would like to insist on some particular points.

If all men are made on the same pattern, how is it that Theosophy is not recognized the world over as a solution, and indeed the only solution, to our problems? And if the Absolute is one, how is it that it expresses itself in the lower world through so many different shapes, so many different masks? Well, everything happens as if there were an infinite number of degrees of awake-ness in the Absolute. And indeed there must be. H.P.B. taught us, as I have already said, that the consciousness of

the higher Ego, being *a part of MAHAT*, is omniscient *on its own plane*. If we adopt the metaphysical language which is the sole language fit for expressing the notion of the indivisible unity, we shall say that the part equals the whole (since in the Absolute all values are equal). But that does not mean that, in its evolutionary process, the part equals the whole. However paradoxical it may seem, a part of MAHAT is totally MAHAT, but it is not the whole of MAHAT. There is evidently a difference in the degree of awake-ness between the noetic consciousness of the Logos of our galaxy and the human noetic consciousness. And even if we consider the ‘mahatic’ consciousness only at its human stage, we will also find differences between beings. Madame Blavatsky never told us that our individualities were fully active. They are probably more than half asleep. Who can doubt that there is a tremendous difference between the noetic consciousness of an Adept and ours? While an Adept sees Reality at the level of his fully completed state of humanity, we can catch only glimpses of it. May I repeat: a part of MAHAT is totally MAHAT, but is not the whole of MAHAT.

Now, how can we, sons of MAHAT imprisoned by our incarnation in an illusory world of separateness, how can we ever hope to awake to the noetic consciousness of our individuality? Theosophical teaching gives a technique to that end, a technique which is meditation. As you know, to meditate (in the theosophical sense of the word) does not consist in thinking, but in going beyond conceptual thought. Meditation silences our lower mind and permits us to perceive the ineffable splendour of THAT which IS, and to merge more or less with it. Naturally our spiritual sight is poor, but it is better than total spiritual blindness. Sometimes beginners (and we are all perpetual beginners) wonder how they can look at what they do not see. But how could we possibly see what we do not look at? Meditation needs training, a deliberate discipline which always pays in the long run.

Another point I would like to insist upon is this: Theosophy is a wisdom, that is to say, a direct knowledge of the One Reality — a knowledge which cannot but lead to moral behaviour. Since the noetic consciousness is absolute on its own plane and since the Absolute is indivisible, when we speak of your higher Self and my higher Self, we are in a way playing with words. Our personalities are *existentially* distinct from one another because our experience of incarnate life is different. But fundamentally, at the level of our common *essence*, we are one, i.e. you are me and I am you. And we should not be astonished if the first aim of the Theosophical Society is to form an unconditional nucleus of the universal brotherhood of mankind. Theosophy puts into their proper light the words of one of the greatest instructors of mankind: ‘Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.’

We all have seen our lives changed by Theosophy. Even those among us who are not keen on meditation have acquired a different vision of the world, a feeling of fellowship with all creatures, a new joy, a new freedom. Now the time has come to give that we have received, for the world has arrived at a crucial point in its history. We must realize and tell the world to-day more than ever that the distance separating life from death is as narrow as the edge of a razor-blade.¹² The name of that distance

is TRUTH, neither more nor less. The time has come to make Theosophy the guiding principle for a new age.

A change of attitude towards our fellow-men and towards the problems of our planet can be brought about only by a new comprehension of life, and a new comprehension of life by new thinking. What our contemporaries need most at the present moment is a new mode of thought: more precisely, a kama-manasic thought enlightened by the buddhi-manasic thought. It should not be believed that people awake to a greater or lesser degree to their individuality are uncaring, devoid of thought and indifferent to the destiny of the world! They are thinkers, thinkers of a different type. Just as there is a kama-manasic thought obeying the rules of a binary logic, likewise there is a buddhi-manasic thought which obeys the rules of a higher logic. H.P.B. told us that higher and lower mind are of the same nature. So it is with thought. Thought is relational by nature. Kama-manasic thought establishes relations between ideas. It also establishes relations, through language, between incarnate men. Lower thought cannot be dissociated from language. Buddhi-manasic thought establishes its own special relations between spiritual notions and also between divine entities and men. It can furthermore establish a direct relation between the higher and the lower mind, between the real entity and its mask. Remember H.P.B.'s words: 'The individuality is omniscient on its own plane.' Omniscience is omnipotence.

Of course, in our attempt to transmit the message we have received from our elders, we shall meet with some difficulties of communication. We shall have to formulate it in terms that can be accepted by our contemporaries, as our forerunners always did in the past. This is an endless task, for knowledge and language are not static: they evolve. A discourse which was valid yesterday may be less adequate to-day.

In order to give what we have received, we shall have to conceptualize and re-conceptualize constantly the a-temporal notions on which the theosophical teaching is based. We shall have to put into concepts our own experience of Theosophy, knowing very well that the major part of the spiritual experience will never be formulable.¹³ (Theosophy is for us more than a mere theory we can read in books. We try to experience it, do we not?) We shall have to formulate new categories of concepts applicable to all the domains of human knowledge and articulate them into a coherent system, aware that no conceptual system can be definitive and everlasting. We shall have to develop theosophical research in order to open up new fields for philosophical, scientific and religious ideation. Then all human activities will be progressively illuminated by the Light from above, and the course of history will be radically changed. A tremendous task, too big for us, some people will undoubtedly think. But that is no excuse for remaining idle. Of course we do not expect to see the face of the world changed in our lifetime. We are not the dreamers some imagine us to be. We do not have the ambition to do more than we are able to do. Our present task is to prevent the patient from dying, and at our own level WE SHALL DO THAT, for such is our DHARMA. Later on, after we are gone, new generations of Theosophists will contribute more effectively to make the world a place where peace,

intelligence, love and hope reign instead of war, stupidity, hatred and despair. There is not one Theosophist who cannot contribute to this great task at his own level and in the circumstances in which he is placed.

Throughout space and time, we Theosophists are small links in an immense chain of goodwill.¹⁴ We were helped out of our karma-manasic prison by Instructors on the human plane who themselves were aided by Great Beings whose features our spiritual eyes can barely distinguish, so dazzling is the light They radiate.

We were helped, therefore we must help others. Ingratitude is not for Theosophists.

NOTES

1 *Cuchulainn's geasa.*

Properly speaking, a "geis" is a limitation imposed on you either by divine or by human will. When you transgress against a geis, you place yourself "off limits", so to speak, and you are no longer quite yourself, hence the notion of a deadly danger attached to the transgression against geasa.

Our freedom is limited by all sorts of geasa: juridical, cultural, religious, psychological, physiological, etc.

2 *Binary logic.*

Binary logic is founded on what Aristotle called "the principle of the excluded third possibility", namely: a thing cannot be itself and not itself at the same time. It must be either the one or the other. There is no third possibility. This principle is considered as an axiom of logic. As a matter of fact, the said principle is valid only as far as kama-manasic thinking is concerned. A spiritual notion such as "thou art BRAHMAN" clearly shows that, in the Absolute, the axiom in question has no more value than a postulate.

3 *Analysis.*

The process of analysis was caricatured in the 5th century B.C. by the Greek philosopher Zeno of Elea. May I remind you of his famous paradox?

A race is organized in which Achilles-of-the-swift-feet and a tortoise are to participate. Achilles is allowed to start only a few minutes after the tortoise, to give the slow animal its chance. When will Achilles overtake the tortoise? According to Zeno: never! Before reaching the tortoise, he said, Achilles will have to run half the distance which separates him from the animal, then one half of the remaining half, and so on ad infinitum....

We may retain from this "reductio ad absurdum" that analysis will never permit us to know in its entirety the thing-to-be-known.

4 *The average solar year.*

We must content ourselves with an *average* solar year, for various astronomical "accidents" may sometimes affect temporarily the rotation speed of our planet. Anyhow, we know that, on the whole, the rotation speed of the earth has been slowing down all through the ages and so the day has a tendency to become longer. Of course, all these variations of speed are infinitesimal at our human scale of time.

It would not be fair to blame the ancient Mayas for having found for the day a duration slightly longer than we have. An important solar eruption happening at the time their calendar was established might have temporarily accelerated the rotation speed of the earth.

5 *The earth is not a perfect sphere.*

We can indirectly know the shape of the earth since artificial satellites have been launched into space. But even so, we cannot arrive at a definite number for the length of the Greenwich meridian, for example, for the volume of the earth is not constant. According to some physicists, it is slowly increasing.

6 *The "old" metre.*

I never understood why the first definition of the metre was announced as "the quarter of the ten millionth part of the earth's meridian", instead of the forty-millionth part!

The length of the iridium-platinum metre (10% iridium, 90% platinum) was approximately equivalent to that of the forty-millionth part of the Greenwich meridian, as far as we can measure it.

7 *The negative confession.*

The ancient Egyptian believed that, after physical death, his soul was taken into a room where, under the presidency of Maat, the Goddess of Justice, and in the presence of crocodile-headed assistant judges, all the good and evil in him was weighed. It was a serious affair, and the deceased used to protest his innocence (at the risk of cheating a little).

"I never caused suffering to men.

I never was aggressive toward my next of kin.

I never substituted injustice for justice.

I never frequented wicked people.

I never committed any crime.

I never intrigued for personal ambition.

I never ill-treated my servants.

I never uttered blasphemous words.

I never deprived the poor of his food.

I never was responsible for famine.

I never caused men to weep.

I never murdered anybody, nor ordered any murder.

I never caused illness amongst men.

I never stole offerings in temples.

I never committed disgraceful acts in the precincts of temples.

I never attempted to enlarge my domain by illegal means, nor to annex the fields of others.

I never falsified the weights of the scales nor their beam.

I never took the milk out of the mouth of a child.

I never trapped the fowl destined for Gods.

When angling, I never baited my line with dead fish.

I never blocked the running water when it should run.

I never demolished the dams on rivers.

I never extinguished a fire when it should burn.
I never prevented a God from manifesting himself.
I am pure!"

This confession informs us about the social behaviour of ancient Egyptians. I am afraid we are still at the same stage of moral evolution. In spite of the teachings of all religions, our common ethic is still negative and consists in not doing certain things for the fear of God, instead of doing things for the love of God.

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8 *About concepts.*

The formulation of a concept also depends on culture and language. For example, the unitary concept of "oblivion" is usually rendered in English by the verb "to forget".

I have forgotten his name.

I forgot to buy bread.

I have forgotten how to prune trees.

I forgot my umbrella.

In Brittany, this unitary concept of oblivion corresponds to at least four different concepts. In the case of the above-mentioned examples, a native speaker of Breton will say:

ANKOUEZHET EM EUS E ANV. Literally, I have completely forgotten his name.
(Total amnesia: in spite of all my efforts, I cannot remember his name.)

DISONJET EM EUS DA BRENAN BARA.

Literally, I "unthought" to buy bread.

(Forgetting by inadvertence; I had in my mind to buy bread, but my attention was diverted by some other thought).

DIZESKET EM EUS PENAOS E VEZ BENET GWEZ.

Literally, I "unlearned" how to prune trees.

(Disappearance of something learned.)

CHOMET EO VA DISGLAVIER WAR VA LEC'H.

Literally, my umbrella remained after me.

(An omission which, at the level of your subconscious, expresses your lack of affinity for umbrellas. You now visualize the absent umbrella which becomes the grammatical subject of an active verb, and so is made responsible, in a way, for its having been forgotten. That serves it right! If the umbrella had been something more akin to you,

it would not have “remained” after you.

(“Concepts are the results, *rendered permanent by language*, of a previous process of comparison.” Sir W. Hamilton.)

Naturally, when you pass from one culture to another, you must change your system of concepts.

9 *Theosophy is founded on spiritual notions.*

Theosophy is not a philosophy created by the lower mind. It is Divine Wisdom, as its name implies.

10 *Bibliography.*

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11 *“Personare”.*

The Latin word “persona”, “the mask”, comes from the verb “personare”, i.e. “to resound”. The mask contained a little amplifier so that the actor’s voice could reach the farthest seats of the theatre. There were only open-air theatres at that time and, naturally, microphones had not yet been invented. So it is quite right to say that our personality hides and at the same time expresses the real being we are.

12 *The narrow distance between life and death.*

If we refer to the etymology of the Chinese words TAO, YANG and YIN, we shall say that the Path (Tao) is situated at the very ridge of the mountain, the narrow ridge which separates the southern, sunny and warm slope (Yang) from the northern, shadowy and cold slope (Yin). This ridge is the border-line between life and death.

13 *About the necessity of formulating concepts.*

In theory it is possible for a man to transmit directly his spiritual perceptions (notions) to another. Such, by the way, is the real sense of the word “telepathy”. But telepathy is very restricted in its use at our present stage of spiritual evolution. In practice, since most people are polarized in their personality, we must use language which is the verbal expression of conceptual thought, the only kind of thought they can receive. By so doing, we leave out the major part of the spiritual perception. Only poets, in their inspired moments, contrive to manipulate language in such a way that words carry more meaning than normally.

14 *The immense chain of goodwill.*

This is why we cannot fail in our attempt to rescue the world, provided we remain faithful to the theosophical ideal. Our success may be more or less rapid and significant, depending on our own fervour, but we cannot fail if we do not break the chain.

